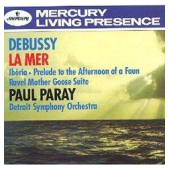
Debussy: La Mer- Iberia- Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun- Ravel: Mother Goose Suite (1994)



Claude Debussy *1. Iberia (Images For Orchestra, No. 2): In The Streets And Byways 2. Iberia (Images For Orchestra, No. 2): Fragrance Of The Night 3. Iberia (Images For Orchestra, No. 2): Morning Of A Festival Day 4. Prelude A l'Apres-midi d'Un Faune 5. La Mer: From Dawn Till Noon On The Sea 6. La Mer: Play Of The Waves 7. La Mer: Dialogue Of The Wind And The Sea* Maurice Ravel *8. Ma Mere l'Oye: Pavane Of The Sleeping Beauty 9. Ma Mere l'Oye: Hop-O'-My-Thumb 10. Ma Mere l'Oye: Laideronette, Empress Of The Pagodas 11. Ma Mere l'Oye: The Conversations Of Beauty And The Beast 12. Ma Mere l'Oye: The Fairy Garden* Detroit Symphony Orchestra
Paul Paray - conductor

This absolutely wonderful disc never should have gone out of print, which means that it did far too soon. Actually, most of the Mercury titles have been ignored for the last decade or so, and if you don't want to buy one of the mega-sets that is all the rage these days, the ArkivCD program is the way to go. Packaged with the original notes and sounding just as good as I remember, this is a winner.

As a young collector in high school, I sneered at Paray's work in Detroit due to less than perfect strings and a lack of flashy podium effects that I craved when picking up new CDs. I gave this disc carelessly to a friend, believing that I could find better albums out there. And to a point, I was correct. Reiner, Munch, Bernstein, and others boast superior orchestral discipline and more obvious "interpretations". However, few conductors today can match the lean and seemingly effortless style of Paray. Winds have an absolutely delicious tang, and absolutely nothing is fuzzy. In the Debussy, few recordings of La Mer match this one for transparency and color. Yes, the Detroit strings pale in comparison to Karajan's Berlin forces, but how much more detail Paray finds with clearer textures. This Prelude was the first Debussy recording I ever loved, and hearing it again confirms it as one of the best ever captured. It absolutely refuses to drag, and features unbelievable solo work. Paray proves himself a master of creating excitement through

his unfailing musical taste. And nobody in the Detroit Symphony proves a liability.

In the Mother Goose Suite, I was blown away by just how much more interesting this music is if you keep it moving. Those very French woodwinds spin magic everywhere. They easily make you forget that the Detroit strings are hardly ideal for Ravel. Everything else is basically fabulous, including the fabled Mercury sound. Not the best album of these pieces ever, but a must for any serious collection of French music. ArkivMusic deserves great credit for allowing us to hear it again. --- Brian Wigman, classical.net

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